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AUTHOR McHewitt, Earl R.
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ABSTRACT

This report describes graduation rates for the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) in 1994-95 using three different measures: cohort analysis, time to graduation, and a ratio of curriculum students to awards. The first section compares the use of two cohort analyses to determine graduation rates for students who entered in fall 1990. In the first method, the standard method used by the VCCS, career studies certificates are not included in the cohort, while in the second method, based on Student-Right-to-Know (SRK) regulations, career studies certificates are included but certificates earned after 2 years are not. This section indicates that using the "standard" cohort analysis, 18.2% of a cohort of 6,499 fall 1990 students graduated, while according to the SRK method 17.9% of a cohort of 6,594 students graduated. The second section examines completion rates in terms of the number of years and terms 1994-95 graduates took to complete a degree. This section indicates that 25% took 3 years to finish a two-year award, while the average median number of terms taken was 8 and the average median number of years was 4. The third section presents a simpler method of calculating a 1994-95 graduation rate, forming a ratio of the number of awards granted to the number of curriculum-placed students enrolled within the same year. Using this method, 14% of the curriculum-placed students in 1994-95 received awards. (TGI)

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VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

Research Report Series

Standard (Student-Right-to-Know) and Alternative Measures of VCCS Graduation Rates

Spring 1996

JC 960 348

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Standard (Student-Right-to-Know) and Alternative Measures of VCCS Graduation Rates

Spring 1996

Earl R. McHewitt
Director of Research
(804) 225-2297

This report presents three pieces of information on the completion of awards in the VCCS.

Nearly all reviews of college output or success measures agree that graduation rates should be based on cohort methodologies. These methods measure how many from a group of students sharing some common characteristics complete a program within a fixed period of time. While generally adopting the method, community colleges have long argued about what is an appropriate entering class or cohort. This group, or denominator in the calculation, is often criticized for including students not planning to graduate and automatically lowering rates. Similarly, rate differences among colleges are often attributed to student classification practices, not to differential award attainment. Rates for two cohort methods, one approximating that of federal student-right-to-know requirements, are presented below (both are available in RADSS).

The second section describes the length of time to complete a degree for the most recent VCCS graduates. In this section, graduation rates indicate "how long for how many," not simply "how many." Because most cohort methods include only a small proportion of community college students and typically track students for fewer years than that needed by most to earn a degree, rates in this second section may be more useful for viewing degree completion.

The third section describes a much simpler method of obtaining a graduation rate. A ratio of input(curriculum students) to output(annual awards) is formed from readily available, and federally reported, numbers. Technical support for tracking a cohort or summarizing the enrollment history of graduates is not required.

VCCS Graduation Rates, Cohort Methods

The SCHEV J report of a few years back required the reporting of completion rates over a seven year period for a cohort of new students. This procedure evolved into one commonly used in the VCCS and available in the RADSS user library(PFNRL04A or PFSOM04B). Student-right-to-know(SRK) regulations are now defined well enough by IPEDS to develop a preliminary procedure. The first table provides a comparison of the rates from the "standard" and the newer SRK methods. The only differences between the two are the exclusion of career studies certificates in the "standard" method and the elimination of certificates not earned within two years in the SRK method. Actually, IPEDS rates require more specific completion periods for different awards, but annual rather than term reporting of awards precludes most of these calculations. As the table shows, the IPEDS or SRK rates, as currently proposed, will be very similar to those previously reported by the VCCS(RADSS PFSOM04C). The official IPEDS report is to be prepared by SCHEV staff and will include additional information on transfers(within Va.) and persisters.

VCCS GRADUATION RATES
FALL 1990 STUDENT COHORTS

	VCCS "Standard"			IPEDS, Student-Right-to-Know		
College	Cohort	Graduates	Percent	Cohort	Graduates	Percent
Blue Ridge	221	65	29	221	64	29
Central Virginia	48	11	23	49	11	22
Dabney S. Lancaster	61	28	46	61	27	44
Danville	221	103	47	221	101	46
Eastern Shore	39	19	49	50	29	58
Germanna	157	40	26	158	39	25
J. Sargeant Reynolds	66	9	14	68	9	13
John Tyler	111	20	18	114	17	15
Lord Fairfax	221	58	26	222	56	25
Mountain Empire	302	58	19	330	55	17
New River	288	50	17	289	48	17
Northern Virginia	1618	140	9	1622	141	9
Patrick Henry	157	37	24	159	35	22
Paul D. Camp	76	11	15	80	12	15
Piedmont Virginia	240	32	13	240	32	13
Rappahannock	98	23	24	98	22	22
Southside Virginia	233	69	30	240	61	25
Southwest Virginia	228	85	37	229	84	37
Thomas Nelson	421	48	11	421	47	11
Tidewater	841	101	12	857	108	13
Virginia Highlands	310	84	27	310	83	27
Virginia Western	487	73	15	500	81	16
Wytheville	55	20	36	55	19	35
VCCS (Total)	6,499	1,184	18.2	6,594	1,181	17.9

Method
Both cohorts are based on Fall 1990, first-time, full-time, curriculum-placed students. The SRK method includes career studies certificate students. The standard does not. Both allow three years(150% of catalog time) for completion of two year awards. For the standard all awards completed in three years count. For SRK, certificates of any length must be completed in two years.

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Award Attainment Rates in Years and Terms, 1994-95 Graduates

For 1994-95 VCCS graduates, a look back was taken to see the numbers of terms and years between their first term enrolled and graduation. The "how long for how many" measures in Table II complement the basically "how many" focus of cohort methods and avoid the problems of cohort definition. Basically, average years and terms and several centiles are used to describe time to completion for last year's graduates. For the system, twenty-five percent took three years(Q1) to finish a two-year award, with four years being the average(50th centile). Three-fourths(Q3) were done after seven years. It is interesting that three years is the 25th centile, suggesting that if a cohort were created that somehow included only those who were going to graduate, the graduation rate would be 25% at the end of the standard completion period. The eventual rate(95th centile) corresponds to the JCAR recommendation that cohort methods should continue tracking to the point at which nearly all, ninety-five percent, of the cohort had graduated. Looking back for the 1994-95 graduates, it was sixteen years before most, so defined, had graduated. It is unlikely that this point, ninety-five percent completion, would ever be reached by a VCCS cohort. It is useful however for describing the overall persistence of a graduating class.

Method

For all students graduating in 1994-95, the number of terms enrolled and the years elapsed between the year they first enrolled and 1994-95 were calculated. RADSS-generated variables at the student master level simplified the analysis(FSTACDYR and ENRLHIST).

AWARD ATTAINMENT RATES IN YEARS AND TERMS
1994-95 GRADUATES*

	Average Completion		Completion Rates (Years)		
	Median Terms	Median Years	Q1 (25th Centile)	Q3 (75th Centile)	Eventual Rate 95th Centile
Blue Ridge	7	3	3	5	13
Central Virginia	8	4	3	7	15
Dabney S. Lancaster	8	3	2	5	9
Danville	8	4	3	5	12
Eastern Shore	7	3.5	2	5	8
Germanna	7	4	3	5	13
J. Sargeant Reynolds	8	4	3	7	18
John Tyler	9	4	3	6	14
Lord Fairfax	7	4	3	6	14
Mountain Empire	7	4	3	6	11
New River	7	4	3	8	16
Northern Virginia**	8	4	3	6	7
Patrick Henry	8	6	4	15	22
Paul D. Camp	8	5	3	9	19
Piedmont Virginia	8	4	3	7	15
Rappahannock	7	4	3	7	13
Southside Virginia	7	4	3	6	16
Southwest Virginia	8.5	6	4	11	18
Thomas Nelson	9	5	4	7	16
Tidewater	8	4	3	7	16
Virginia Highlands	7	3	2	6	11
Virginia Western	8	5	3	9	17
Wytheville	7	3	2	6	12
VCCS	8	4	3	7	16***

*Two-year awards only. **For NVCC, the number of years since first enrolled is limited to RADSS history, 7 years.

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***Eventual rate, 95th centile, calculation excludes NVCC data.

Award Productivity, 1994-95, Awards Produced as a Percentage of Award-Seeking Students

The last and simplest measure is presented in Table III. During discussions of SPRE requirements, the VCCS proposed this rate because of its simplicity. A ratio is formed of the number of awards granted to the number of curriculum-placed students enrolled within the same year. Although not avoiding possible problems with student classification, it does eliminate the need for tracking and much of the technical support required by the other methods.

Method

Fall 1994, mid-term headcount for curriculum-placed students divided by total awards for 1994-95.

AWARD PRODUCTIVITY, 1994-95

College	Fall 1994 Students	1994-95 Awards	Percentage
Blue Ridge	1,409	273	19.4
Central Virginia	1,765	361	20.1
Dabney S. Lancaster	578	185	32.0
Danville	1,014	388	38.3
Eastern Shore	255	65	25.5
Germanna	1,569	241	15.4
J. Sargeant Reynolds	5,465	808	14.8
John Tyler	2,953	378	12.8
Lord Fairfax	1,762	307	17.4
Mountain Empire	2,226	307	13.8
New River	1,862	419	22.5
Northern Virginia	25,822	2,610	10.1
Patrick Henry	1,806	320	17.7
Paul D. Camp	1,026	169	16.5
Piedmont Virginia	2,090	259	12.4
Rappahannock	1,238	249	20.1
Southside Virginia	2,170	307	14.1
Southwest Virginia	2,858	588	20.6
Thomas Nelson	6,313	736	11.7
Tidewater	12,800	1,512	11.8
Virginia Highlands	1,468	318	21.7
Virginia Western	3,939	553	14.0
Wytheville	1,064	392	36.8
VCCS	83,452	11,740	14.0